

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock**

Statement on mission to Ankara and the Turkey/Syria border, 10-11 October 2019

I am just completing a long-planned visit to the border region between Turkey and Syria. My original goal was to understand and assess the issues around the UN's cross border relief operation from Turkey into Idlib, the future of which the Security Council needs to decide later this year.

I have repeatedly expressed my concern about the impact on civilians of military operations in Idlib since late April. The last month has been quieter, but violence continues in front line areas. Hundreds of thousands of people have been forced in recent months to move further north and west in the Idlib area to escape violence. I have seen pictures of and heard about camps full of displaced people tight against the border wall that now separates Turkey and Syria.

As Syrians on both sides of the border have told me while I have been here, the population of Idlib are inextricably dependent on the UN's cross border relief operation for food, shelter, water, health and education services. The humanitarian suffering – and the wider consequences – arising from a failure to renew the mandate for the UN cross border operation would be immense. I will in due course brief the Security Council in more detail on what I have found.

While in Turkey, I have also had the opportunity to express again my deep admiration and gratitude to the Government and people of this country for their exceptional humanity and prolonged generosity in providing refuge for millions of Syrians who have been forced by the war to flee their own country. I urge the international community to be more generous in supporting Turkey in shouldering the burden it has taken on.

My visit has, of course, coincided with the start of the Turkish military operation across the border into north-eastern Syria. I am very concerned by reports of civilian casualties on both sides of the border, and of large numbers of people moving inside Syria in the hope of avoiding the fighting. I reiterate what the Secretary-General of the United Nations has said: that we urge all parties to exercise restraint, to act in line with their obligations under the UN Charter and international humanitarian law, to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, and in particular to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. I have discussed the situation with the Government of Turkey. They have assured me that they attach maximum importance to the protection of civilians and the avoidance of harm to them.

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